

Senator Feinstein Urges Action to Protect Mojave National Preserve

*– Feinstein also says Cadiz project must receive highest level
of scrutiny from Interior Department –
March 26, 2002*

San Francisco, CA – U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) today urged the U.S. Department of Interior to take action to protect the Mojave National Preserve following its listing as one of the top 10 most threatened parks in the nation by the National Parks Conservation Association.

In a letter to Interior Secretary Gail Norton, Senator Feinstein wrote: **“Protection of the California desert areas remains one of my highest environmental priorities as a U.S. Senator. As such, I was surprised to read that the National Parks and Conservation Association has characterized the Mojave as one of the 10 most endangered Parks and Preserves in the country. The problems in this report need to be investigated.**

“The report publicizes one project that I have continued to follow closely and have written to you on several previous occasions – the Cadiz Groundwater Project. This project involves storing groundwater in the underground aquifer and withdrawing that water as needed for Southern California water districts. The project relies on some questionable assumptions made by private geologists that do not agree with the assumptions of the U.S. Geological Survey.

“As a result, I believe that this project must receive the highest level of deliberation and scrutiny. I am counting on your support for the quality control measures to the Cadiz groundwater project I suggested to you in my letter on January 29, 2002.”

Copies of the March 26, 2002 and January 29, 2002 letters from Senator Feinstein to Secretary Norton are attached.

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March 26, 2002

The Honorable Gale Norton
Secretary-- U.S. Department of Interior
1849 C Street NW Suite 7229
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Norton,

I am writing to call your attention to the Mojave National Preserve. I am the author of the 1994 California Desert Protection Act which established the Mojave National Preserve, the Joshua Tree National Park, and the Death Valley National Park. Protection of the California desert areas remains one of my highest environmental priorities as a U.S. Senator.

As such, I was surprised to read that the National Parks and Conservation Association has characterized the Mojave as one of the 10 most endangered Parks and Preserves in the country. The problems cited by the report need to be investigated. In the meantime, I will continue to do what I can to see that the Mojave continues to receive necessary appropriations to purchase land from willing sellers, to manage wild burros and other non-native species, and to complete the construction of the Kelso Depot Visitor's Center.

The report publicizes one project that I have continued to follow closely and have written to you about on several previous occasions- the Cadiz Groundwater Project. This project involves storing groundwater in the underground aquifer and withdrawing that water as needed for Southern California water districts. The project relies on some questionable assumptions made by private geologists that do not agree with the assumptions of the U.S. Geological Survey. As a result, I believe that this project must receive the highest level of deliberation and scrutiny.

I am counting on your support for the quality control measures to the Cadiz groundwater project I suggested to you in my letter on January 29, 2002.

Sincerely,

January 29, 2002

The Honorable Gale Norton
Secretary-- U.S. Department of Interior
1849 C Street NW Suite 7229
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Norton,

I am writing to express my continued concern about the Cadiz Water Supply Program and the disagreement between the U.S. Geological Survey and the Cadiz company over the recharge rate. The USGS believes that the Cadiz geologists have overestimated the groundwater recharge rate by 5-25 times, but feels confident that the monitoring plan will force an end to the project once it becomes evident that the aquifer is being overdrafted.

Rather than relying on a monitoring plan that has never been used before to prevent overdrawing the aquifer, why not limit the project to the water storage plus Cadiz's existing water rights and/or the USGS's assessment of a recharge rate? To be on the safe side, could the Bureau of Land Management place a temporary cap on the recharge portion of the project of about 5,000 acre-feet until this issue can be resolved?

The storage part of this project combined with the Cadiz Company's existing water rights is an essential component of California's plan to meet its water needs under the Colorado River 4.4 Water Plan. However, the project as it is laid out in the Final Environmental Impact Report/Final Environmental Impact Statement is still based on a recharge rate that the USGS believes is faulty.

This recharge rate information is vital and it is imperative that the USGS should have wide latitude to do everything possible to determine the actual recharge rate. If the USGS subsequently determines that the recharge rate is too low, this cap can be lifted and the project can be expanded to include a higher recharge rate? Without such a step there is no way to be entirely confident that the additional water for the Cadiz project is not coming at the expense of the Mojave.

Sincerely,